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*Stuffed and Starved the Hidden Battle for the World Food System*

*Stuffed and Starved* by Raj Patel delves into the many issues of the world food system and how these issues came to be as well as offering some hope for solutions to this monstrosity of a problem. The book begins with the staggering statistic that, “The hunger of around one billion happens at the same time as another historical first: that they are outnumbered by the one and a half billion people on this planet who are overweight”. While people are constantly reminded that there are people going hungry, this fact is rarely coupled with a reminder that there are even more obese people than hungry ones. The truth is that many of the people who are going hungry are also producing food for the rest of the world.

This book begins by examining where our food production begins, with the farmer. Patel states that the suicide rates for famers across the world have been increasing because of the low prices that they are offered for their crops and being unable to pay pack their loans. Many farmers have no other livelihoods so maintaining the farms that have been passed down for generations is of the utmost importance. Farmers are getting paid less and less for crops as cheaper versions of these same crops are being imported and as the amount of money owed becomes larger, the quality of life for them and their family is in constant decline. This causes many farmers to see suicide as the way out.

An example of one of the acts that ended up hurting a lot of poorer farmers was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This was an agreement between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico that ended up forming an unfair competition between two rich countries and one poor one. Because a lot of farming in Mexico was not subsidized, poorer farmers struggled to keep up with Canada and the United States because these countries could produce more corn for a cheaper price and sell it to Mexico. This caused many farms in Mexico to go belly up as there was no longer a market for corn that they could compete in.

Patel states that while there are many people employed in agriculture and even more consumers for the products that they produce, there are only a very small number of food processors and distributors to bridge the gap between these groups. This is where the bottleneck occurs and the power is in only a few hands instead of many. This gives big corporations a lot more power because they have the money that gives them the capability to have successful businesses. This book examines what factors have made it so people in the world can be starving and stuffed. Patel looks a lot at trade agreements as well as profit and politics as the root of the problem.

This book was very informative and I liked that there were a lot of references to back up what Patel was saying. However, I also found the amount of information a bit overwhelming at times. It was quite clear that this book was extremely biased but I appreciated that there were facts to back up Patel’s personal feelings. The part of the book that I enjoyed the most was that Patel constantly brought up examples of groups fighting back against the larger corporations and the compassion among the oppressed, which gave a sense of hope and optimism.